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FOR NEA/ARPI, LONDON FOR GOLDRICH

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: PDAS CHENEY IN KUWAIT: WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS,  
ECONOMIC REFORM, IRAQ, AND IRAN

REF: A. KUWAIT 2831

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 2759

[1](#)C. KUWAIT 2730

[1](#)D. KUWAIT 2606

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) During her June 25 visit to Kuwait, NEA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Cheney congratulated Kuwait's first female minister, Dr. Ma'souma Al-Mubarak, on her appointment and discussed with her the political reforms and education needed to help Kuwaiti women enter the political arena and run for national office in 2007. Dr. Ma'souma, as well as MP Mohammed Al-Sager, cited electoral redistricting as key to women's political success. Dr. Ma'souma and FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed rejected a quota for women in the National Assembly as anathema to Kuwait's democratic history. The FM restated GOK support for Iraq, and he and Al-Sager called for Syria to end its destabilizing practices. Both also expressed concern about the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran. Economic Advisor to the PM Yousef Al-Ebrahim said the GOK was working on the conditions necessary to proceed to the next round of TIFA talks. PDAS Cheney lauded the May 16 decision granting women full political rights and subsequent appointments of several women to key leadership positions. She encouraged further political reform and offered U.S. support and assistance in preparing women for participation in the 2007 elections. She pressed Kuwait to stay the course on economic reform and clarified that the TIFA discussions and eventual FTA are based on economic criteria. She restated U.S. support for Iraq's political development and expressed concern about the role Syria is playing in supporting terrorist activities in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories. On Iran, PDAS Cheney said the election of Ahmadinejad did not reflect the true will of the Iranian people. PDAS Cheney also commended the strong, supportive relations between the U.S. and Kuwait and welcomed more exchange programs and visits by Kuwaiti officials. In a full day of meetings that garnered substantial press coverage, PDAS Cheney met with women activists at two separate events about the struggle for full political rights and the conditions necessary to ensure women exercise these rights, as well high school students in the YES exchange program who offered their views on forging stronger ties with Kuwaiti youth (septel). End Summary.

Women's Voting Rights: A Good Start But More Reform Needed  
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[1](#)2. (C) Recently appointed Minister of Planning and Administrative Development Dr. Ma'souma Al-Mubarak opened her June 25 meeting with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Cheney by crediting her time in the states as a student in the 70's and 80's for launching her career as an activist. She noted that both she and Secretary Rice received their doctorates from the University of Denver. She described the struggle of Kuwaiti women to gain their full political rights as a "marathon" and said the May 16 decision granting those rights was a historic day. That Parliament passed the bill through the democratic process legitimized the decision, making it much more important and giving it greater weight. She called her appointment and the naming of two women to the Municipal Council a good start, but said it was not enough. Stating, "Some MPs are not ready for the change," she said her focus was on the 2007 parliamentary elections and Kuwait would need U.S. support and assistance in order for women to be elected. She said Kuwaiti women needed to learn from Americans how to campaign and she hoped the delegation of five women ( Lulwa Al-Mulla, Amal Al-Khaled, Dr. Nada Suliman Al-Mutawa, Dr. Nibal Bourisly, and Araoob Al-Refa'e) traveling to the U.S. o/a June 29 and the Prime Minister's July 1 visit would be the start of the educational process.

Women In Parliament: Redistricting Preferable To Quotas  
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[1](#)3. (C) Commenting on the electoral process, Dr. Ma'souma said a quota system was not viable and the GOK would be likely to consider setting aside a certain number of seats for women as undemocratic. She said Kuwaiti women had a lot of work ahead of them, but was optimistic they could make political advances. She said Kuwait was more open than other

Gulf societies and it would be possible for women to campaign in mixed settings. She cited as the real challenge getting both men and women to support female candidates. She said there needed to be a change in the mind-set and believed her role as the first woman minister would pave the way. She commented that the greater obstacle to women being elected to Parliament was the current configuration of electoral districts. Currently there are 25 electoral districts, many of which are very small, facilitating vote-buying and giving greater strength to tribal ties. Dr. Ma'souma supported reducing the number of districts to five.

14. (C) Like Dr. Ma'souma, Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah called a quota system for women's political participation "alien to Kuwaiti culture." He said the notion of quotas was considered in 1962 when the constitution was promulgated in order to promote equal participation among college graduates, workers, and farmers (as had been done in the Egyptian parliament), but in the end, the GOK decided one man - one vote. Kuwait also rejected setting aside certain ministerial posts for members of the ruling family. He said the key to changing the political landscape was the registration of women voters.

15. (C) Liberal MP and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager, whom the PDAS met later in the day, agreed on the need for electoral reform. He said there would be no real change in Parliament until districts had at least 40,000 voters. He said the current small size (his district has 6,500 registered voters) made it easy to buy votes. He claimed a candidate could purchase 1,000 votes with 500,000 KD (\$1.7 Million). In addition to redistricting, he called for the formation of political parties, and passage of a new law permitting anyone to print a newspaper. He cautioned, however, that these reforms would have little impact while there was in-fighting within the Al-Sabah family over succession. This prevented development of a clear vision for Kuwait and weakened the GOK in front of the Islamists and other conservative blocs.

#### Women Will Change the Nature of Kuwaiti Politics

16. (C) Responding to PDAS Cheney's question about GOK promotion of women's political participation, Planning Under Secretary Sara Al-Diwisan, who accompanied Dr. Ma'souma, said

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the Ministry was working on a five-year sustainable development plan for Kuwait. She said Kuwaiti women represented 50.9 percent of the population and pursued advanced degrees at a greater rate than men. These two factors would have a significant influence on elections and the GOK was examining how to factor these trends into planning at the public and private levels. Dr. Ma'souma added that a committee led by Shaykha Latifa Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah, wife of Crown Prince Shaykh Saad, and reporting to the Council of Ministers was charged with laying the groundwork for women to participate in the 2007 elections. She said the GOK was solidly behind the women's movement and she was "inspired by its support." She reported that Kuwaiti NGOs were strengthening ties with international organizations and NGO and GOK representatives would meet with the UNDP on preparing women to participate in the next parliamentary elections. She asserted, "Kuwaiti women will not just be trained, we will practice politics in Parliament."

17. (C) In a separate meeting, senior Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister Dr. Yousef Al-Ebrahim said women's political participation would change the nature of the issues to be debated in Parliament. He predicted a greater focus on principles and said although Islamists would likely benefit in the 2007 elections, he did not anticipate any continuing opposition from them on women's suffrage in general. He discounted their objection to Dr. Ma'souma's appointment, maintaining that the constitutional process was followed. (Note: Some Islamist MPs objected to the appointment of Dr. Ma'souma arguing that ministers had to be registered voters. Women will join the electoral roles in February 2006. Several ministers, including the FM and PM, countered that as members of the ruling family, they are not registered to vote. (ref b). End Note.) He further critiqued several Islamist MPs -- Nasser Al-Sane, Ali Al-Deqbasi, Ali Al-Khalaf, Fahad Al-Khanna, Mohammed as Busairi, and Waleed Al-Tabtabaie -- for lauding the political change before British PM Blair at the European Parliament recently. These very MPs had voted against the bill. Al-Sager also criticized the behavior of his fellow parliamentarians.

18. (C) PDAS Cheney congratulated Dr. Ma'souma, the FM, Al-Sager, and Al-Ebrahim on the historic achievements, said Kuwaiti women served as an example to others in the Middle East, and offered U.S. assistance in preparing for the 2007 elections. She identified communications, polling, and campaigning as areas of American expertise and said the U.S. was particularly interested in supporting activities where Kuwaiti women could interact with other politically active

women in the region. She also noted that many members of Congress were interested in meeting their Kuwaiti counterparts and women activists. PDAS Cheney stressed empowering women was a U.S. priority and said she looked forward to continued close cooperation on these matters.

#### GOK Determined to Hold Round 2 Of TIFA Talks

9. (C) PDAS Cheney continued the reform discussion, focusing on ongoing TIFA talks, with senior economic Advisor to the Prime Minister Dr. Yousef Al-Ebrahim. Al-Ebrahim reported the GOK was closely following the progress of the Central American FTA in the Senate. He said the GOK was committed to free trade with the U.S., but did not imagine that conclusion of an agreement would have a significant short-term, economic impact on Kuwait. He noted concern that some Kuwaiti industries -- banking and insurance -- would be adversely affected by the agreement, but argued that its import was largely in strengthening overall bilateral ties with the U.S. He questioned the U.S. focus on IPR as a key to TIFA progress, citing the easy availability of counterfeit products on the sidewalks of New York and Washington. He said the GOK did not want IPR to be an obstacle to a second round of talks and was working hard to combat IPR violations. He reported that the new labor law was with the Council of Ministers and while the GOK wanted to proceed quickly with the necessary groundwork for the next round of talks, the process would be protracted because the GOK, unlike other GCC countries, had a legislative process to follow which prohibited GOK leadership from making snap changes to laws.

10. (C) PDAS Cheney replied that the TIFA requirements in anticipation of an FTA actually helped governments to explain the process to parliaments. It was important that the GOK be able to explain the FTA to those who oppose it and to articulate the benefits of such agreements. She emphasized that the agreements were based on economic, not political criteria, and reiterated that progress was needed on IPR as well as TIP issues in order to proceed. She further informed Al-Ebrahim of the President's commitment to a Middle East Free Trade Area and restated the U.S. commitment to working with Kuwait.

#### Iraq

11. (C) FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed opened his discussion with PDAS Cheney with a review of the U.S.-EU International Conference on Iraq. He said the gathering was an opportunity to galvanize international support for Iraq and was pleased that attendees talked about the political process and not war. He was also pleased that the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG) had a chance to share its views in an international forum. He reported that GOK used the conference to reaffirm its support to Iraq: \$565 million in reconstruction assistance, of which \$125 million would be provided as grants and the balance in long-term soft loans (ref a). Of this amount, the GOK has already spent \$5 million in Najaf. Shaykh Dr. Mohammed said the ITG requested additional projects in southern Iraq, but the GOK did not want to be "characterized as working only in the south." The FM also expressed interest in working with other donors on development projects. He reported that following the Madrid conference, the GOK was ready to work with others on power plant projects and bemoaned the lack of progress. The Ambassador advised the FM that the ITG Minister of Planning had the lead on donor coordination and encouraged the GOK to contact his office.

12. (C) PDAS Cheney briefed the FM on ITG PM Ibrahim Al-Jaafari's meeting with the President and solicited the FM's views on Syria's role in the insurgency in Iraq and instability in the region. Shaykh Dr. Mohammed reported that during his June 18-19 visit to Kuwait, Al-Jaafari raised the need for better control of the Iraqi-Syrian border, and said he intended to visit Damascus. He added the Syrian delegation in Brussels said it was working to strengthen border security and announced President Bashar Al-Asad and a delegation would travel to Baghdad. For its part, the GOK has cautioned Syria and was advised the GOS and ITG were coordinating efforts and Damascus would follow Baghdad's lead. The Minister was pleased to hear that Barham Salih had taken up this role.

13. (C) MP Al-Sager told PDAS Cheney he supported the liberation of Iraq but strongly believed the U.S. made a mistake in planning for it. He said more effort should have been made to consult Turkey, Syria, and even Iran. He said Iraq and Syria had the same type of regime and fueling Syria's current destabilizing behavior is a fear that it was next on the U.S. list. PDAS Cheney disagreed that overtures to Syria would have made a difference and chastised Syrian support for terrorists and its role in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestinian areas. Al-Sager opined that Al-Asad, if he could get away from the old guard, would be different. Iran: Out Of Step With the Rest of the Region

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14. (C) Responding to Shaykh Dr. Mohammed's request for U.S. views on elections in Iran, PDAS Cheney replied that the success of former Mayor of Tehran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad did not reflect the will of the vast majority of the Iranian people. She noted that the American -- and international -- expectations for Iran to live up to its obligations would remain unchanged. She observed that Iran remained out of step with the region. The U.S. remained deeply concerned about Iranian support to terror organization, including Hezbollah. At the same time, it was clear that the Iranian people wanted better relations with the rest of the world and the U.S. supported them. The FM proffered there was room for change if Ahmadinejad carried out his campaign promises. By opening a dialogue with the west, he could be the "Menachem Begin of Iran," but since his direction was not yet clear, he could end up being the "Kim Jung Il of Iran." Shaykh Dr. Mohammed said Khatemi and Rafsanjani both played indispensable roles in preventing complete upheaval in Iran, but the GOI now needed to make a choice. ITG PM Al-Jaafari's statement that Iraq would remain close to the U.S. even in event of some sort of military engagement with Iran was carried widely in the region and sent a clear signal about Iran's isolation. MP Al-Sager called Iran a danger and said the election results were a good thing because "we can now see the ugly face of Iran" and predicted the situation would worsen before it improved.

15. (C) Turning to other regional issues, Al-Sager asked the PDAS for a response to accusations the U.S. is interfering in Lebanon. PDAS Cheney advised Al-Sager that the U.S. seeks to be supportive of the new Lebanese government, is working on an international conference to provide support to a new Lebanon, and at the same time sending a clear message to Syria which has withdrawn military, but not intelligence forces from Lebanon. Al-Sager supported recent developments in Lebanon and while he condemned the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, commented that the tragedy sparked rapid, positive change in Lebanon.

The U.S. and Kuwait  
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16. (SBU) Al-Sager told the PDAS the majority of Kuwaitis are pro-American and remain grateful to the U.S. for liberating Kuwait from Iraq, although many feel as if the U.S., focused primarily on Iraq, has ignored them for the past six years. He recommended a broader bilateral dialogue, increased exchange programs and more senior-level visits to Kuwait. He said he understood U.S. politics and knew the Administration had to factor in Congress, the media, and special interests groups when developing its policies. Kuwait, therefore, had an obligation to help the Administration justify its continued presence in the region and assistance to Kuwait and it could do so by opening up society, promoting respect for human rights, and encouraging economic liberalization.

17. (SBU) Al-Ebrahim and his assistant, Sara Al-Musallam, commented that the views of Kuwaiti youth on the U.S. are colored by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One way to address such biases is through educational and other exchange programs. Both were supportive of the MEPI Junior Achievement program being developed for Kuwait and welcomed other projects to motivate and challenge Kuwaiti youth. Al-Ebrahim said Kuwait did not need U.S. aid, but rather its organizational expertise.

PM Visit To Washington  
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18. (C) Shaykh Dr. Mohammed said Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah hoped his July 1 visit to the U.S. would be the start of an "annual ritual." He stressed the close relations between the U.S. and Kuwait and opined that regular visits facilitated the exchange of views. He reported the PM's agenda for this visit included next steps for Iraq, the peace process and the expansion of the quartet, the Global War on Terror, economic reform, and trafficking in persons (septel). PDAS Cheney welcomed regular visits by GOK officials and said U.S. officials looked forward to meeting with the PM. She provided an update on peace process issues and reaffirmed U.S. engagement.

19. (U) PDAS Cheney cleared this message.

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